1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14



children are abhorred and every effort is made to get the woman married should she be pregnant. Although her shame is great, it is nothing compared to the problems that the new individual will encounter unless people come to accept his mother's agnatic kin group as his—and whether that group will in fact accept him as a member. The pariah status of illegitimate children is easily seen in the widespread belief that they can only marry others like themselves or people of slave status.

So much then for the first two features of kinship, those of genealogy and descent. The third aspect, that of marriage relations, brings us much closer to what is commonly thought of as family life in western society. Using the anthropological jargon, we can sum up the kinds of relations invoked by a Kanuri marriage by saying that Kanuri marriage is polygynous with virilocal residence patterns which have a patrilocal emphasis and an exceptionally high divorce rate. In plain English this means that the men can marry more than one wife, up to four by Islamic law (they are polygynous); the wife invariably leaves her home to go and live with her husband in a place chosen by him (they are virilocal); and, this often but not always proves to be in the vicinity of, or even inside, the household of the husband's father (there is a tendency toward patrilocality). Finally, most Kanuri marriages, the vast majority of them certainly, end in divorce.

Because a marriage usually involves the creation of whole sets of kinship links where none existed before, the way in which such changes are brought about and made "official," or publically recognized, is an important aspect in the anthropological study of marriage. Furthermore, such activities are also very important moments in the lives of the individuals concerned, who must see to it that all that should be done is done correctly according to traditional custom. Thus we start looking at marriage by describing its inception.

In thinking about a marriage the first question that any Kanuri man asks himself is whether he can afford it or not. That is, can he and those people on whom he can count for financial aid take on the expense of a marriage ceremony and bridewealth payments; and, if he can, how high can he go?

A man who already has a wife or wives knows that he must give gifts, supposedly equal to those going to the bride, to wives already married to him. He knows that the pressures for expenditures for drummers, food, transportation of the bride to his dwelling, and many other aspects of the ceremony, will very likely involve more of an outlay than he can readily predict. Can the capital be raised for such an undertaking? Most men are helped by their friends, their kin, and their political and economic patrons if they have any. Kanuri recognize the outcome of marriage expenses in their oft-quoted saying, "A man who is not in debt over a wedding is a man who has no friends."

Bridewealth payments form the basic marriage expense, and they can vary in size and elaborateness depending upon the status of the two family groups who are joined through the marriage, the marital history of the girl, the previous relationship of the groom to the girl's family, the bargaining power of each party to the marriage arrangement, and the time of year during which the payments are to be made. Although other factors can enter in and pull the bridewealth up or down in individual cases, these are the most effective determinants of bridewealth.

The payments themselves can be divided into three general categories, plus a "rebate." First there are one or more small gifts given to the girl and her rela-

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571 576 mutters "yes, yes, yes" while his superior is talking but keeps his eyes cast downwards; to very powerful superiors like the Shehu he must not talk directly at all, but to an intermediary. Wives of such persons are treated like senior in-laws. Indeed, given the traditional practice of giving wives to clients, often from among one's own daughters, it is quite possible that the wife of a superior will one day become the mother-in-law of a client subordinate. [582]

571 576 602 As a person grows up in his family, he also learns that there are some people with whom he can have very permissive relations. The ideal person is a grandparent, although a similar relationship exists between a spouse and all of his younger in-laws. A young boy can go to his grandfather's house and take things, pull his grandfather's beard, and generally misbehave, all the while receiving only a pat on the head for such licentiousness. Sex differences do not count here although there is sexual joking especially in the relations between a person and a junior in-law of the opposite sex.

571 576 578 602 [182] Later in life young boys and girls learn that such joking (*suli*) is a special form of interaction that can also be carried out between traditionally competitive occupational groups and traditionally hostile ethnic groups. On an individual basis one person in such a relationship calls the other "grandson" and the "grandson," being the younger, calls the older man "grandfather." The Kanuri explain that this helps to alleviate any tensions which may develop between the persons in such groups who are natural competitors or by tradition hostile to one another.

571 572 593 602 Finally, in the extended family and the household a young person grows up with brothers, sisters, and cousins who are also called siblings. The closer the age and interests of "siblings" of the same sex, the greater the solidarity and friendship. During childhood the young person usually chooses a young age-mate from amongst his siblings or cousins as his *ashirmanzə* or "secrets man," the person who knows his most intimate thoughts, hopes, and fears. Later in life, he chooses other *ashirmanzə* from inside his kinship network and outside it. He learns the faculty of intimacy, however, in his youthful friendships in the family and the household.

571 867 626 The family and the household then are orbits in which ways of behaving are learned and these characteristic norms of behavior are used for wider-scale social relations throughout the individual's life. At the core of these relations is *bərzum* discipline-respect. As well shall see, Bornu is an interwoven set of economic and political hierarchies, and this relationship of *bərzum* serves as the chief mechanism for the proper functioning of these complex relations between superiors and their subordinates.

## The Household

• 59 Kinship may form the biological and the behavioral basis for Kanuri society, but it does not provide a place for such relations to operate. The Kanuri live in cities, villages, and hamlets and the basic unit of organization in these settlements is the household, rather than the family or any set of kinship groups. Even though these may be synonymous in some cases, in many compounds family and household are certainly not the same, and the distinction is fundamental to an understanding of the society. Furthermore the household, or compound as it is sometimes called, is stable in comparison to the family. The family can be split, and

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very often is, by divorce or death, or the movement of its members to a new place. While such changes occur, the household remains; its personnel may change, its landholdings may expand or contract, and its relations with other households through its household head may shift—but people see it as an organization in terms of which settlements are built into larger units; into wards, hamlets, villages, cities, and finally, the state itself.

The personnel of a household is based on that of the family, and generally moves through a cycle that may involve several alternatives to the usual pattern. Let us start with a couple. A young man marries for the first time, and in about sixty percent of the peasant cases recorded for three rural villages in Bornu, he brings his wife to the vicinity of his father's compound or moves into a section of his father's compound. If the latter is the case, he will move to his own compound close by after his own conjugal family (his wife or wives and children) increases in size either through the birth of children or the acquisition of more wives. When his own children grow up, his daughters leave to marry and return from time to time because of divorces or separation from their current spouses. Because many sons bring their wives to their father's household or close by, the original father finds himself the nominal head of a growing patrilocal extended family which, as we shall see in Chapter 6, can in time become a separate ward or sub-ward of the town. When the father dies, the oldest son or the most capable or successful of all sons takes over the compound of the dead father. Lands and goods are apportioned among the male heirs, although the person taking the father's role sometimes takes half the land and divides the rest equally among the living heirs. Thus in one case a man with three brothers took his father's fields and divided them in half. One-half he kept for himself, and the other half he split among the three brothers.

A problem that frequently emerges at this time is that of the mothers of half siblings—the wives of the dead man. The man who takes over his father's compound or household tends to install his own mother there as a dependent, since most old women are without husbands.[2] If she is a vigorous woman, she can become a powerful person in the household. Indeed in the royal household she has a special title, as we have seen, and was traditionally a noble-woman of great power. The other wives of the dead man must go and live with their own kinsmen, usually one of their sons. In one case this problem was intensified by the fact that the household head, a powerful political leader, had only one son and that by a concubine. When the present head dies, his senior wife, a woman of very powerful upper class affiliations will have to leave and her own slave—a woman very much junior to her—will be installed as the senior woman of the household. Such eventualities can cause tension between the members of any household who know that some day the power and authority relationships within the household will change hands.

In the same vein, siblings tend to drift apart after the death of their father. Even though they live close by one another, their unity and cooperation is not as great after the father's death as before. On the other hand, this can be ameliorated by social and economic factors which are important to keep in mind. Thus if a senior brother takes over a powerful political role, or a lucrative economic one, and

[2] As a woman approaches old age she finds it extremely difficult to remarry and thus most old women are resigned to being beyond the marriageable period of their lives.

000 ousies between his wives.

• 59 The separate nuclear families which make up the larger polygamous Kanuri family demonstrate an overall unity when one focuses attention on the household as a structural group. At the core of the household is the polygamous family, but the household may include many other individuals, both kin and non-kin.

595 855 [152] Polygamous families also appear much more unified when one attends to the behavior of adults towards children within the household. Though the presence of children is potentially the greatest source of jealousy between co-wives, particularly when one wife has borne one or more children while another has never borne a child, Kanuri attitudes and treatment of children within the household minimizes these jealousies. All women within reach of a child play with it, feed it, and watch over it. Children wander freely in and out of the houses of their father's wives (their ya chinta), and differences between co-wives are not permitted to extend to their children. In effect, children bridge rather than emphasize the gaps between co-wives and between nuclear families.

5. The Household.

592 It is a natural step to move from a consideration of the polygamous family, the central kin group in Kanuri society, to that of the household. However, though the household has the polygamous family at its core, it is not primarily a kin group.